

The Vetting Room

Jerry Blackwell – Nominee to the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota



For more than thirty years, Jerry Blackwell has been a leader in the Minneapolis legal community. The outspoken attorney has now been tapped for the federal bench.

Background

A native of Kannapolis, NC, Jerry W. Blackwell received his B.A. from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill in 1984 and then a J.D. from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill School of Law in 1987.

After graduation, Blackwell joined Robins Kaplan LLP in Minneapolis, serving as a partner until he moved to Nilan Johnson Lewis in 1996. In 2000, Blackwell started the firm of Blackwell Igbunugo in Edina, Minnesota. In 2006, he moved to Blackwell Burke where he currently works as a partner.

In 2015, Blackwell was named a possible candidate for the federal bench to replace Judge Michael Davis. *See Randy Furst, Names Begin to Surface for New Federal Judge Post, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Jan. 3, 2015.* Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Wilhemina Wright was nominated instead and confirmed.

History of the Seat

Blackwell has been nominated for a seat on the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota. This seat opened on December 31, 2021, when Judge Susan Richard Nelson moved to senior status.

Legal Career

While he has moved firms a few times, Blackwell has spent his entire legal career in private practice in the Minneapolis area. However, this has netted him some prominent representations, including being the attorney for Minneapolis native Prince. *See* Cheryl Johnson, *Purple House is Demolished; Prince's Neighbors Say They Don't Know Why He Leveled It*, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Apr. 3, 2003.

Early in his career, Blackwell represented the Government of India in suits related to the Bhopal gas explosion. *See* David Phelps, *'Zealous Advocate' Wanted to Be Lawyer From Second Grade*, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Aug. 5, 2012. Later, he defended 3M against lawsuits alleging that the company's air blowers deposited infectious bacteria in surgical incisions. *See* Joe Carlson, *3M Case May Alter Medical Lawsuits*, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Oct. 28, 2017. Blackwell also authored a successful pardon application for Max Mason, who was convicted in 1920 for allegedly raping a white woman (whose own doctor had testified that she had not been assaulted). *See* Brooks Johnson, *Historic Pardon in Duluth Lynching*, Minneapolis Star Tribune, June 13, 2020. The conviction had also prompted the lynching of three innocent black men in Duluth. *See id.*

Notably, Blackwell joined the prosecution team against police officer Derek Chauvin who was charged with murdering George Floyd in 2020. *See* Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, *What to Know About Jerry W. Blackwell, The Prosecutor Making Opening Arguments*, N.Y. Times, Mar. 29, 2021. As part of the trial, which ended in a conviction, Blackwell made opening and closing remarks.

Political Activity

Blackwell has been a frequent (<https://www.opensecrets.org/donor-lookup/results?cand=&cycle=&employ=&name=jerry+blackwell&order=desc&sort=D&state=MN&zip=>). political donor throughout his legal career. Among the benefits of his donations are Governor Tim Walz, Attorney General Keith Ellison, and President Barack Obama.

Writings and Statements

Throughout the years, Blackwell has written and spoken frequently in the media, particularly on issues of race. In 1992, Blackwell commented regarding the acquittal of police officers charged with beating Rodney King and subsequent rioting, noting:

“When we have systems in place designed to protect people and mete out justice, and when it's apparent that they don't further justice, my concern is that people are left to their own devices. Self-preservation steps in at some point and you have outbreaks, resistance,

throughout the country” See Mark Brunswick, Jim Walsh, Kevin Diaz, *At Rallies in Twin Cities, Many Decry Injustices While Police Aim to Reassure*, Minneapolis Star Tribune, May 1, 1992.

In another article, Blackwell noted his emphasis on diversity in hiring, noting that it is “good business” as it attracts clients who are “reluctant to work with a firm that was hostile to hiring people of color and women.” Deborah Caulfield Rybak, *Diversity ‘Good Business’ For Black-Owned Law Firm*, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Feb. 9, 2003 (quoting Jerry W. Blackwell).

As President of the Minnesota Association of Black Lawyers, Blackwell had objected to the firm of Maslon, Edelman, Borman, & Brand from joining Twin Cities Diversity in Practice, a consortium of corporations and law firms seeking to hire minority attorneys, citing the firm’s representation of white students challenging affirmative action policies at the University of Michigan. See Katherine Kersten, *2 Standards for Diversity in the Legal Fraternity*, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Sept. 7, 2006.

Overall Assessment

Jerry Blackwell would come to the federal bench with extensive experience with federal practice and with the Minneapolis legal community. While his outspokenness may draw some opposition, Blackwell is still nonetheless favored to join the federal bench before the end of the year.

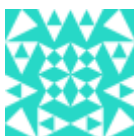
150 Comments



He would have been a solid nominee in 2015 when he was first named as a possible candidate for the federal bench. But now that he’s in his 60’s, his age is his only draw back. Unfortunately that’s a huge draw back in my opinion. He’s so good otherwise that I’ll still give him an “A-“.

posted 18 Jul 2022 at 11:41 am by Dequan

Reply



Solid nominee, and good to see more black men nominated, there is a growing hostility black men have for Biden and Democrats, all the pandering and efforts go to black women but Andre Mathis still can’t get a floor vote since being nominated in November. Black men won’t vote.

OT: The California nominees are really really terrible, what’s their reason for this? One state judge after another, prosecutor after prosecutor, this latest batch is unforgivable.